Northern Flows

Alaska's Drinking Water & Wastewater Program Newsletter
Issue 6 •Winter 2000/2001

Message from the manager

The holiday season is over and the year is at an end. We at the DW/WW Program looked back over the past year's accomplishments and want to thank all of you who have helped make sure your community drinking water and wastewater systems are safe. Our progress, and success in safe and healthy communities are measured in the well being of our children, elderly, and you, the residents of Alaska - may we do even better next year. I wish you the happiest of holiday seasons and, I hope they've been joyous and full of good health and cheer. Best wishes for a prosperous 2001!

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This Issue

What Does Your PWS Need to be Doing?

At the end of each year, some tests are due for most Public Water Systems. Here are some tips to be sure that your system is ready for the year 2001:

- Do you have a wall calendar for 2001 with all the important dates for operation and compliance marked?
- What tests will be due in 2001? An insert is enclosed to help you review the frequency and type of tests required. Put the dates you need to order bottles, take the tests, and return samples on your calendar.
- Was a nitrate sample taken in the year 2000? Every federally-regulated (Class A and B) water system nationwide must complete this simple test at least once every calendar year. If you haven't done it for 2000, call the lab to get bottles.
- Were VOC's, inorganics or gross alpha samples due this year, or this quarter? If so, do them now.
- Was the last sanitary survey done over five years ago? If so, make arrangements to schedule a survey. If some of the system is buried by snow, this may be a spring-time activity so plan ahead. Approved surveyors: →

http://www.state.ak.us/dec/deh/water/qualinsp.htm

- Are any violations for the system not resolved? Check federal violations at: → http://www.epa.gov/enviro/html/first_time.html or call your Drinking Water Specialist, to review outstanding violations.
- Do you have 4 bottles on hand in case of a positive bacti sample? This is especially important if you don't live in a city with a certified laboratory.
- If your system uses surface water, how is the daily testing and monthly reporting being done? The new year is a great time to review procedures in-house, especially if late or missing turbidity and disinfectant tests have been the cause of violations.

Use the enclosed testing schedule to submit samples at the right times

PWS Upgrades: Planning and Funding

Many Public Water Systems (PWS) nationwide will need to upgrade their infrastructure to meet the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act. Early planning is essential to having the money when you need it. What changes will your water system need to meet new rules, and what will it cost? Arsenic removal, disinfection of groundwater, and improved turbidity removal are among the structural improvements many Alaskan public water systems will need. The PWS will need an engineer to study the alternatives and design the upgrade. Finding money will be critical in meeting compliance deadlines. Some PWS's may find it less expensive to connect to a larger PWS. (Remember any change to a PWS must have a Certificate to Construct from DEC before starting work.)

For rural, native, and organized communities: The Guide to Financial and Technical Assistance for Water and Wastewater Projects is available for free. Call Nicole at 1-888-750-3823.

Is your PWS owned by a for-profit business?
You can get free counseling on cash flow, funding, and business issues: Call the Service Corps of Retired Executives at 1-800-755-7034 and ask for SCORE counseling. The Small Business Development Center at UAA also offers counseling at 1-800-478-7232. ~

Staff Profile - Lab Certification Officer

Veronica DeBoer is the Environmental Microbiologist and Certification Officer for DEC at the Food Safety Lab in Palmer. As the Microbiology Certification Officer, Veronica is responsible for inspecting and certifying 32 drinking water microbiology labs throughout Alaska. During these certification inspections, she ensures that the minimum requirements, as determined by EPA, are being met by the lab. This includes making sure each lab follows approved methodology, that facilities and analytical equipment are adequate, and that analysts are competent in performing the analyses. Each lab is required to be inspected at least once every three years, so this means that Veronica travels frequently, visiting 12 to 15 labs each year. She also conducts Drinking Water Microbiology training classes at the Palmer Laboratory twice a year to certify analysts in approved drinking water microbiological analyses.

A graduate from the University of Michigan with a degree in Microbiology and Public Health, she came to Alaska in 1991 looking for adventure in the great outdoors. Veronica's first job in Alaska was working as a lab analyst in the Quality Control department at Matanuska Maid. In 1994, she began work with DEC as lab analyst. In 1995, Veronica was promoted and began her duties as Microbiology Certification Officer.

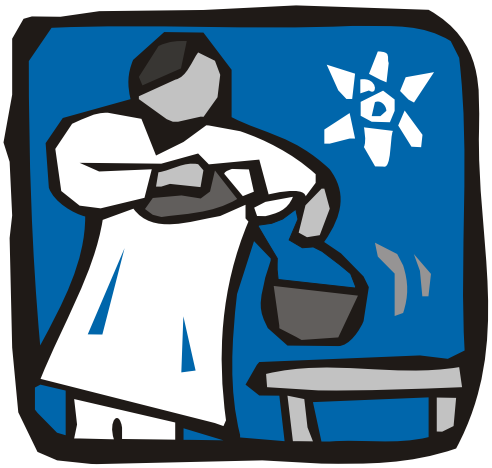
Veronica also volunteers for the Cook Inlet Keepers and the Alaska Water/Wastewater Management Association. For Cook Inlet Keepers, she maintains a water quality monitoring site in Hatcher Pass to help make sure the water quality in the Cook Inlet watershed is clean. She likes to spend her time exploring the beauties of Alaska by hiking, skiing and kayaking. Veronica is a very important member of the DEC team, responsible for ensuring the safety of drinking water in our state. ~

Regulation Update

Here's your chance to have your voice heard. The proposed changes to the drinking water regulations include:

- Adoption by reference of the Interim Enhanced Surface Water Treatment Rule (IESWTR);
- Adoption by reference of the Disinfectant/Disinfection By-Products Rule (D/DBPR);
- A new section requiring certain PWSs to have a certified operator in accordance with 18 AAC 74;
- A new fee to cover the cost of performing a Composite Correction Program; and
- Revised sanitary survey requirements.

The public comment period is from December 8, 2000 to January 22, 2001. Please review the proposed regulations on the web at: → http://www.state.ak.us/dec/dec_cal.htm#dw and provide us with your comments. To request a copy of the proposed regulations to be mailed to you call Sandra Woods at (907) 465-5318 or e-mail Sandra_Woods@envircon.state.ak.us ~



2001 Certified Installer Training Schedule

The 2001 schedule of the Certified Installer training is summarized here and can be found, along with other wastewater information, on the web at → http://www.state.ak.us/dec/deh/water/training.htm

Installer training will be provided again this year by the Mining and Petroleum Training Service (MAPTS), a division of the University of Alaska Anchorage. To obtain additional information concerning the Certified Installer Program, contact Margaret French at the Kenai DEC office at (907) 262-5210 extension 223.

Classes are scheduled for Wasilla, Valdez, Anchorage, Kenai, and Fairbanks. Class size may be limited so pre-register. Contact MAPTS at (907) 262-2788 to register.

Class locations and dates are the following:

Wasilla/Palmer, Mat-Su College, Snodgrass Hall Room 118 - February 8, 2001

Valdez, Westmark Valdez Hotel, 100 Fidalgo Drive, Mariner Room - February 22, 2001

Anchorage, Anchorage MAPTS, 2000 W. International Airport Road Airport Business Park - March l, 2001

Kenai, MAPTS Life Safety Institute on Marathon Road - March 8, 2001

Fairbanks, UAF Wood Center-Conference Rooms E&F - April 27, 2001 ~

Importance of Wastewater Treatment Plant Maintenance

Package treatment plants, sometimes called aerobic treatment units (ATU), are being installed for single family homes more frequently then ever. They are an alternative for treating domestic wastewater typically used on sites with difficult conditions, such as poorly percolating soils (or insufficient soil depth), elevated groundwater table, instances where minimum separation distances can't be met, or when a higher level of treatment prior to discharge is required. In many cases, these systems discharge directly to the land or water, and often to sensitive environments.

When ATU's are properly operated and maintained, the discharge meets our treatment standards. However, experience has shown that inadequately maintained ATU's eventually fail, discharging effluent that doesn't meet minimum quality standards.

In Alaska, we currently have over 5,200 ATU's statewide, with most located in Southeast and Southcentral Alaska. But, an increasing number are being installed in the Interior. About 200 new systems are installed statewide yearly outside the Municipality of Anchorage.

A recent study done in West Virginia found that 92% of 419 (primarily single family) aerobic treatment units appeared to be discharging effluent of unacceptable quality. Some failures may be due to other problems, but the extent of problems is still significant.(The study appeared in *Small Flows Quarterly,* Volume 1, Number 4, published by the National Small Flows Clearinghouse.) Alaska, like West Virginia, only requires systematic maintenance for the first two years following installation, with no requirement for maintenance after that.

In contrast to West Virginia, a similar study in Texas had much different results. In 1997, fewer than 8% of the units evaluated were failing. The primary difference between Texas and West Virginia, is that Texas requires quarterly maintenance for the life of the system, while West Virginia requires maintenance for the first two years only.

Alaska appears to be having the same problems as West Virginia. If maintenance is not performed on a periodic basis, mechanical treatment systems like ATU's fail and pollute ground water and surface water. In response to this problem, DEC's next wastewater regulation revision will propose a requirement for ongoing maintenance for these individual package treatment plants. It's been proven that maintenance will extend the life of the system and protect our environment.

If you have comments or suggestions, please contact David Johnson at (907) 262 5210, ext. 238 or e-mail David_Johnson@envircon.state.ak.us.

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Important Information

For Water Operators and Owners

Northern Flows

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